

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS.

PAMPHLET C.

"LARGER" KINDERGARTEN MATERIAL.

In *The Pedagogical Seminary* for October, 1894, there appeared an article by John A. Hancock, Fellow in Pedagogy, Clark University, entitled "A Preliminary Study of Motor Ability." The article was little more than a careful report of a series of tests made by Mr. Hancock, and certain teachers under his direction, upon children of kindergarten and primary school ages, to determine the limits of stability in various forms of muscular control. The results of these tests, and of similar investigations made by other students of child nature, were such as to raise the question in the minds of many thoughtful teachers whether young children were not being forced beyond their capacity by the fineness and complexity of the muscular adjustments required of them in their earliest school exercises; and whether such forcing, if it existed, did not work grave harm to the nervous system of the child? It seemed as if we all might have fallen unawares into the mistake of thinking that because the child is little he should have small things to work and play with — small balls to toss and catch, small dolls to dress, small figures and letters to make, and small pencils to make them with, etc. The conclusions of Mr. Hancock, however, pointed unmistakably in the opposite direction. "Kindergarten work," he said, "generally is too fine. Too great precision, involving delicate and complex co-ordinations in pasting, weaving, folding, pricking and sewing, is insisted on. Occupations and games for young children should be of a nature that will involve large muscles and movements."

He found that the motor control in children in the first year of school life is from one-third to one-sixth that of adults!

In order to make a practical application and a further test of these conclusions along a somewhat different line of approach, the experiment was begun of offering to the children in the kindergarten of the State Normal School at Worcester, Massachusetts, a choice between the "material" of the usual size and the same material much larger — roughly speaking, about twice the ordinary linear dimensions. This experiment was begun in October, 1895, and the choice of each child was recorded daily for a full school year, no word or intimation being ever given to the children to influence their preference, or even to suggest that there was any difference in the material. Not quite enough of the material was provided *of either size* to go round, so that a few children each day might be obliged to take what was left, whether they preferred it or not.

The result from beginning to end was unequivocal and significant. The children preferred by a constant and decisive majority the larger material. They also showed more skill and facility in manipulating it. Whatever the reasons for their preference, there was no doubt whatever about the fact.

The larger material has been retained as a regular feature of our kindergarten ever since, not to the exclusion of the smaller, but along with it, open to the choice of every child. (See "wing-frame" 5, and the exhibit in the cabinet "show-case.") It has never driven the smaller out of the field, nor is it invariably chosen by the same child, but it has maintained its ascendancy, and our conviction is that its withdrawal from use would be a serious disadvantage and deprivation to the children.

From the beginning made here nine years ago, the use of this new material has spread somewhat widely, so that it is not uncommon to find it here and there, but so far as we know, it has not been exclusively "adopted" anywhere, nor do we see any reason why it should be. Its introduction was opposed at first — perhaps is still — by the class of conservative kindergartners who cling to traditional



"LARGER" AND SMALLER MATERIAL IN USE.

forms and methods, and also perhaps by a few persons who have vested interests in the manufacture and sale of the more usual size. It is more bulky, and consequently requires more room for its free use, and it costs more than the smaller material. But experience compels us to believe that it is more physiological and more in harmony with the capacities and instincts of little children than the earlier material — certainly far better than strict confinement to the earlier material.